

park maintenance activities, including mowing and herbicide use. *I. reclinata* does not tolerate shade and requires open areas, which were maintained historically by hurricanes and, possibly, by fire. The ecological characteristics and requirements, population structure and dynamics, and responses to habitat changes and management manipulations by *Jacquemontia reclinata* are not known.

Public Comments Solicited

The Service solicits written comments on the recovery plan described. All comments received by the date specified will be considered prior to the approval of the plans.

Authority: The authority for this action is section 4(f) of the Endangered Species Act, 16 U.S.C. 1533(f).

Dated: November 9, 1995.

David J. Wesley,
Field Supervisor.

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Notice of Intent To prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the Acquisition of Lands for the Big Muddy National Fish and Wildlife Refuge in Counties Adjacent to the Missouri River From the Confluence of the Kansas and Missouri Rivers Near Kansas City, Missouri, to the Confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers Near St. Louis, Missouri

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of Intent.

SUMMARY: This notice advises the public that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) intends to gather information necessary to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the acquisition of lands for the Big Muddy National Fish and Wildlife Refuge (refuge) in Missouri. Public "open house" meetings will be held. Dates, times, and locations of the open house scoping meetings will be published in local media in advance.

This notice is being furnished as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Regulations (40 CFR 1501.7) to obtain suggestions and information from other agencies and the public on the scope of issues to be addressed in the EIS. Comments and participation in this scoping process are solicited.

DATES: Written comments should be received by March 27, 1996. Public open house meetings will be held from 1:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. as follows: January 8, 1996, Park Place Hotel, 1601 Universal, Kansas City, Missouri 64120.

January 9, 1996, Marshall Inn, Highway 65 Bypass, Marshall, Missouri 65340.

January 10, 1996, Capitol Plaza Hotel, 415 West McCarty, Jefferson City, Missouri 65101.

January 11, 1996, Jaycees Hall, City park, Washington and 11th Streets, Hermann, Missouri 65041.

January 12, 1996, The Heart of St. Charles Banquet Center, 1400 South 5th Street, St. Charles, Missouri 63301.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

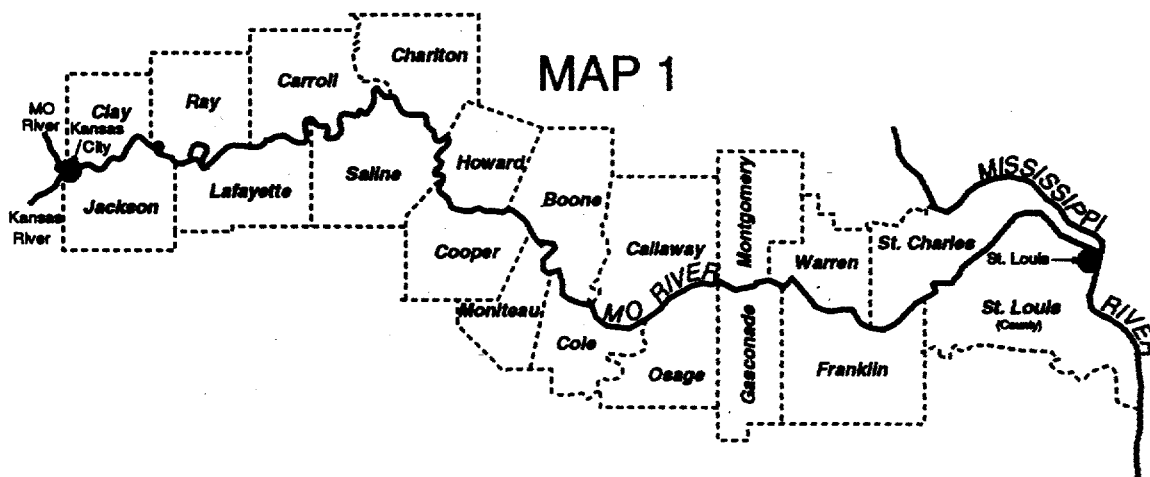
J.C. Bryant, Project Leader, Big Muddy National Fish and Wildlife Refuge, 4200 New Haven Road, Columbia, Missouri 65201-9643; Telephone 1-800-611-1826.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: R. Wayne Weier, Wildlife Biologist, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 24385 State Highway 51, Puxico, Missouri 63960 is the primary author of this document.

Proposed Action

The Service proposes to acquire 60,000 acres, more or less, of Missouri River floodplain land at multiple sites along the Kansas City to St. Louis reach (Map 1) for management as a unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The project area encompasses River Miles 367 to 0 and includes the lower 10 miles of tributary streams and rivers. Land would be acquired from willing sellers through fee less, easement, or other property transfer arrangements. The project would involve less than ten percent of the floodplain in this river reach if the entire acreage were acquired.

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Map. 1. Study area for proposed land acquisition.

Purpose of Action

The purpose of the proposed action is to contribute to the Service's resource responsibilities, as stated in the Service's mission statement, through protection, restoration, and management of Missouri River floodplain lands in the benefit of fish, wildlife, and their habitats and to provide for compatible public use.

Need for Action

The action is proposed to meet Service stewardship mandates for interjurisdictional fish, migratory birds, and threatened and endangered species. Channelization and floodplain development have led to the loss of over 500,000 acres of aquatic and terrestrial habitat in the Lower Missouri River floodplain (between Sioux City, Iowa, and St. Louis, Missouri) since 1912. Consequently, native fish and wildlife resources dependent upon the river and its associated floodplain have declined dramatically. Land acquisition and habitat restoration would benefit a diversity of fish and wildlife resources, including native river fishes, birds such as waterfowl, shorebirds, and passerine birds, and advance the recovery of Federally-listed threatened and endangered species.

Related Actions of Other Agencies

Acquisition of lands and rights to lands under existing Service authorities would complement other floodplain land acquisition being done along this reach of the Missouri River by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Missouri Department of Conservation, and the Federal Emergency Management

Agency. Depending on agency missions, these acquisitions are being made to restore Missouri River habitats, contribute to the river's floodway, or to alleviate past or future flood damage.

Alternatives

Alternatives for the Service to pursue restoration of the Missouri River ecosystem to benefit fish and wildlife include: (1) Acquiring appropriate ownership interest in floodplain lands and managing those lands as Big Muddy National Fish and Wildlife Refuge—a unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System, (2) non-acquisition methods, such as private lands initiatives or public information thrusts, and (3) no action. These alternatives, along with others identified during the scoping process, may or may not be examined in detail in the EIS.

Issues

The following would be likely issues under the Service's proposed action: (1) Floodplain land use: Agricultural uses of acquired lands would mostly cease. Forest and wetland habitat, and areas available for outdoor recreation, would increase. Acquired lands would no longer be available to others for purchase. New or expanded transportation and utility systems across refuge land could be authorized through Service issuance of right-of-way permits. (2) Fish and wildlife: The river eventually would reconnect to its floodplain on the refuge, restoring floodplain habitats and functions to the benefit of fish and wildlife, including Federally-listed threatened and endangered species. (3) Economics: Both pluses and minuses would occur. On acquired lands, economic returns from agriculture would mostly cease, while returns from outdoor recreation would likely increase. Long-term,

increases in economic returns from commercial fishing and timber harvest could be possible. Little impact on commercial navigation is expected. (4) Drainage and flooding: Previously established drainage across the refuge would continue. The Missouri River would have a larger floodway in certain areas. (5) Levee and drainage districts: The Service would develop cooperative agreements with levee and drainage districts as required to address specific needs, including levee and drainage system maintenance. (6) County tax revenues: Lands and Service acquired in fee title would be removed from county tax rolls; tax revenue losses would be offset by annual payments to those counties through the Refuge Revenue Sharing Act. (7) Taxes associated with transfer of title: On accreted lands, or for long-term ownerships, capital gains taxes could be so high as to deter land sales by certain owners who would otherwise be willing to sell.

Other Information

The environmental review of this proposal will be conducted in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4371 et seq.), NEPA regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508), other appropriate Federal regulations, and Service procedures for compliance with those regulations.

We estimate the Draft EIS will be available to the public by Fall, 1996.

Dated: October 27, 1995.

Marvin E. Moriarty,

Acting Regional Director.

[FR Doc. 95-28918 Filed 11-27-95; 8:45 am]

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